



**UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE
(U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)**

Hearing on

**“Russia’s Assault on Ukraine and the International Order:
Assessing and Bolstering the Western Response”**

Wednesday, February 2, 2022

2:30 p.m.

**Dirksen Senate Office Building
Room 562**

Opening Statement of Helsinki Commission Chairman Ben Cardin

Today, we gather as Europe stands at the precipice of war. The Kremlin has amassed an enormous array of troops and heavy weaponry at Ukraine’s doorstep, demanding its submission and Western countenance to the restoration of an iron curtain in Eastern Europe. The Kremlin’s threats menace not only Ukraine, our partners in Georgia, and the wider region, but also the long-cherished dream—and longstanding, bipartisan U.S. policy—to work towards a Europe, whole and free.



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In contrast to Mr. Putin’s bluster and blackmail, the Biden Administration has responded with sophistication and determination. U.S. diplomats have met Russian officials in good faith and a focused intent to avert war; and have sought to give Russia all the reassurance it needs, and more, that the United States and its Allies pose no danger to Russia if it abides by its own commitments and obligations. The United States stands ready to find areas of common purpose and cooperation with Russia if it is willing, and sincere. But the sovereignty of Ukraine and the freedom of Europe are not things to bargain away. In this, the United States, Ukraine, and Europe speak with one voice. We are united, and we are resolute.

Last July, along with Ranking Member Wicker, Cochairman Cohen, Ranking Member Wilson, and a number of other Commissioners, I had the opportunity to travel to Estonia, Bulgaria, and Norway. We saw in person that same unity of purpose across NATO’s frontiers at the Baltic Sea; the Black Sea; and the Arctic. Although our shared enterprise is one of peace, the United States and our Allies will not back down in the face of the Kremlin’s aggression, and we are ready to respond to any threat to the peace and liberty of Europe.



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This is why I am proud to be an original co-sponsor of the Defending Ukraine Sovereignty Act of 2022. This bill would provide our partners in Ukraine with the tools and equipment they need to defend themselves, bolsters European security, combats disinformation, and would extend crippling sanctions on Russia's finance and energy sectors, and on senior Russian government and military personnel. Along with other Commissioners, including Senator Shaheen, I am also currently involved in a bipartisan consensus-building exercise to develop a larger bill with wide bipartisan support that we hope will be introduced in the coming days. If the Kremlin chooses war, it will be at great cost to the regime and the Russian economy. However, it is not too late for the Russian government to pursue peace.

As diplomatic talks continue, Russians have the opportunity to consider their place in Europe and the world. The Kremlin may elect to make war on Europe, and risk scathing international isolation, crushing economic penalties, and invite the full defensive power of the Euro-Atlantic to Eastern Europe.



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Or Moscow can recommit itself to diplomacy and its obligations under the Helsinki Final Act, and we can forge a new future based on mutual respect, cooperation, human rights, and democracy. In this future, Russia would know no greater prosperity or global influence, and would be a contributor to international stability, instead of a danger to international stability and prosperity.

It is certainly fitting that the Helsinki Commission is convening this hearing today. With the core tenets of the Helsinki Final Act so brazenly threatened, the importance of those principles and the central role of the OSCE could not be any clearer. No other forum is so well-placed to allow for a direct and fulsome discussion about European security and the principles of human rights, sovereignty, and democracy. It is also the only multi-national organization (other than the United Nations) where Russia and Ukraine, along with every member of NATO and the EU, sit together around the same table.

Whatever Russia's grievances about its place in Europe, and the possible need to revisit the state of the European security architecture, the OSCE is the most appropriate, and purpose-built, forum for such discussions.



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To that end, I would like to welcome our distinguished witnesses today. Dr. Fiona Hill is well known to us all as an accomplished scholar, dedicated public servant, and principled authority. Without a doubt, the depth and sobriety of her expertise on Russia is unmatched.

I am also happy to welcome retired Lieutenant General Ben Hodges, who served as commanding general, United States Army Europe. He is currently the Pershing Chair in Strategic Studies at the Center for European Policy Analysis. General Hodges is now a leading and essential voice for U.S. security policy in Eastern Europe and particularly the Black Sea. He was in Kyiv in recent days meeting with the president of Ukraine and others, and is with is virtually from Germany.

And I welcome Ambassador Bill Taylor, who has been a model of professionalism and surety throughout a distinguished diplomatic career, including most recently during two stints as ambassador to Ukraine. Your wisdom and counsel are most welcome here.

Thank you all for your participation. Let's start with Dr. Fiona Hill.